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TRAVEL

OAK flyers are mistakenly going to SFO following airport rebrand

By **Silas Valentino**, Travel Editor

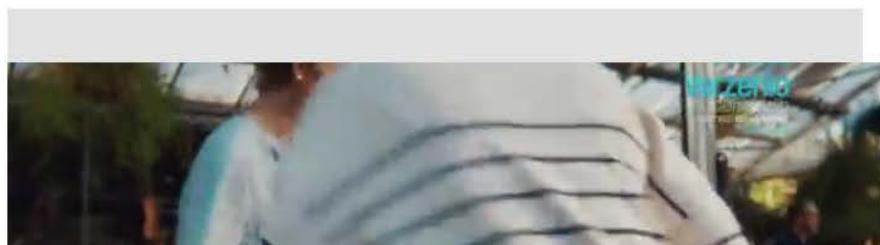
Sep 5, 2024



FILE: Flying over San Francisco Bay in May 2022.

Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

Starting this summer, San Francisco International Airport officials began documenting the number of passengers who have confused it with San Francisco Bay Oakland International Airport.





Over the course of a week in June, SFO logged at least two passengers who had approached an information desk with boarding passes for flights on an airline that does not fly out of the airport but is popular at OAK.

SFO officials are concerned that due to OAK's decision to add "San Francisco Bay" to the front of its official name earlier this year, these types of mistakes are bound to happen more often.

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"While we have had past anecdotes of passengers showing up at the wrong airport, we are currently seeing evidence of confusion that we have not seen before," Doug Yakel, an SFO spokesperson, told SFGATE in an email. "And that confusion will likely increase if OAK continues to roll out its infringing new name."

The Port of Oakland approved the airport name change in April and declared that it was an effort to increase passengers' awareness of OAK's geographic location. Danny Wan, the Port's executive director, defended the name change at the time as an attempt to land more nonstop destinations.

"I fail to see the confusion. It clarifies to the world that OAK is on the San Francisco Bay. It does not confuse and leads to more nonstop option choices at the airport," he said during a Port of Oakland public meeting. "This is not about San Francisco. We're not trying to confuse or copy them."



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FILE: An overview of San Francisco Bay Oakland International Airport.
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The port's commissioners voted unanimously to approve the name change the following month, and in response to that decision, San Francisco City Attorney David Chiu filed a federal trademark infringement lawsuit against the city of Oakland.

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daily operation log sheet that's used by workers at the information desk. The sheet now includes a grid specifically for "New OAK Airport name caused confusion."

Through a public records request, SFGATE learned that six reports of passenger confusion were logged between June 18 and July 1.

The information collected is not comprehensive, and certain details remain unknown. Nevertheless, the log shows two reports of travelers at SFO intending to fly Spirit Airlines, which does not operate at SFO and only departs locally out of OAK and San Jose Mineta International Airport. It also has a report of a traveler at SFO with a boarding pass to Morelia International Airport in Michoacán, Mexico. SFO does not offer a nonstop flight to that airport, but OAK and SJC do.

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A log entry from June 25 had the note, "Dropped off at SFO but flying out of OAK." It is not known whether the passenger provided incorrect details to the person dropping them off or whether the driver conflated the two airports.

Yakel acknowledged that the data is "not an all-encompassing representation of passenger confusion relating to the naming issue." SFO also captured each traveler's contact information to follow up and learn more about their individual situations but did not provide any additional information about these passengers to SFGATE.



The main entrance to San Francisco International Airport's International Terminal.

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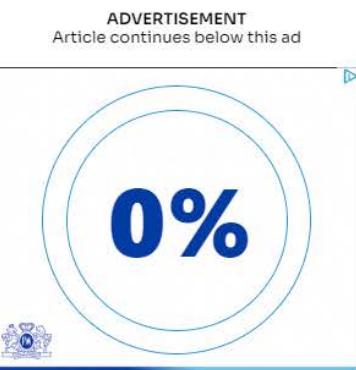
On the other side of the bay, OAK officials downplayed passenger confusion between the two airports.

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"We are not aware of any reports of traveler confusion," Robert Bernardo, the director of communications for the Port of Oakland, wrote SFGATE in an email. "We have a direct phone number and webform on our website that allows members of the public to contact our Customer Relations staff, and we have not received any complaints of this type."

Bernardo added that the port has received only positive feedback about the name change from travelers and their airline and industry partners.

For its part, SJC, near the southern tip of the bay, suffers from an entirely different confusion issue due to its name resembling another airport in another country.



"What we tend to see more is passengers (and occasionally media) confusing SJC with SJO (San José, Costa Rica), rather than OAK/SFO," Julie Jarratt, an SJC spokesperson, wrote in an email.

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Silas Valentino

TRAVEL EDITOR



Silas Valentino is SFGATE's travel editor. He was born in Bakersfield and raised in Marin County. Outside of reading, writing and storytelling, Silas values his family (including 11 nieces and nephews) and exploring the state. He lives with his wife above a wine shop in Cole Valley. You can contact him at silas.valentino@sfgate.com.

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